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ABSTRACT

Agricultural education has grown and flourished in the past because it took students with farm backgrounds and helped them become better managers and producers, thus improving agriculture in general. Now that fewer students are coming from farms into agricultural education, agricultural education has lost its protected status and become just another program of vocational education. If agricultural education is to survive, it needs to move toward a market economic model rather than following somewhat blindly the institutional governmental model. This model suggests that markets and prices interpret the wants of consumers in terms of supply, demand, and price, with markets the driving force. Since being introduced to a modified free enterprise economic model with the Vocational Education Act of 1963, vocational agriculture has wisely supplemented its traditional sole governmental institutional structure with another institutional structure that includes business, industry, educators, state and federal government personnel, as well as postsecondary teachers. This model promotes relevance and reacts to the needs of its constituency. The National Council for Vocational and Technology Education in Agriculture has been organized recently to increase cooperation to meet the needs of a free market educational model. In the future, the agricultural education curriculum will have to change to promote economic literacy and encourage the training of employees for agribusiness. (KC)

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Reorienting Agricultural Education Towards a Free Market Model Emphasizing Economic Understanding

A Presentation at
American Association of Teacher
Educators in Agriculture
Annual Convention

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Max L. Amberson is Department Head, Department of Agricultural and Technology Education at Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana. He served as President, American Association of Teacher Educators in Agriculture (AATEA) in 1981. In 1988 he received the AATEA Special Service Award and delivered the Distinguished Lecture which is reprinted on the following pages.

Malcomb Knowles,[1] author of *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, a native of Montana, suggested that persons reading his book should do so with an attitude of gentle skepticism, that he would feel less inhibited about expressing his ideas, assumptions and convictions clearly and forcefully if he could rely on readers to test his ideas against their own experiences and to adapt those that made sense and to build on them creatively. I hope you will subscribe to his philosophy as I visit with you.

Havell,[2] a managing broker for Neuberger and Berman, Limited Maturity Bonds in New York, also suggested in her newsletter that "the trouble with crystal ball gazing is that occasionally one finds themselves eating crushed glass?"[2] It is, of course, never comfortable to forecast. In education, like economics, forecasters tend to be wrong at exactly the time they are most needed—at infection points. Unfortunately, it is generally human nature to believe that a trend in motion will continue in motion. But forecasting a change in direction leaves the forecaster the most exposed, and subject to ridicule if wrong—another reason to stay with the pack so that all will be right, or wrong, together. So, why even do this forecasting? Alan Greenspan,[3] now heading the federal reserve board replied to this question. "Implicit in any investment action or commitment is a forecast, whether consciously or otherwise. We may not be able to forecast well, yet we have no choice but to forecast.

Upon graduating with my B.S. in Agricultural Education from Montana State University it has been my good fortune to have grown up with the field of vocational agricultural education from the vantage point of a high school and adult teacher, state supervisor and teacher educator with minor interruptions for school and four years in public affairs with an upper mid-west agribusiness firm. I have had many mentors principally from the list of persons who have previously given this same distinguished lecture. Thirty of these individuals have been personal friends and colleagues and have influenced me significantly. Among the first of these leaders was the notable A.M. Field from Minnesota. I met this distinguished gentleman when living in Minneapolis from 1957-1961. I note he spoke in St. Louis on the "Integrated Course of Study in Vocational Education in Agriculture". Though we in Montana agreed with Mr. Field on this concept, we have unsuccessfully struggled with its application.

On a personal note I am reaching my goal of changing from full time employment in agricultural education and vocational education June 30, 1989. About one year late, but as we all know forecasts help clarify goals—targets towards which we aspire. Also, Shirley, my wife of 33 years, tells me after a man has met his generic goals of having a son, building a house and writing a book, what else is there to look forward to, particularly at my age. I'm pleased to step aside for the new wave of agricultural education change agents and lend them any support they might need.

Dr. Leo Knuti, a Minnesota Finlander, my teacher educator and good friend, instilled in his students the belief that there would always be a future in agricultural education as long as "we" would look for and identify those needs with which people could identify. He also suggested that we would come to identify success in life not with achievements in grades but with how many people knew and liked us. I have certainly experienced this to be a truism.

Over the past three years, I have tested my own philosophy and convictions about our field with rigor and admit that I face you today with only broad perceptions of answers. In the Winter 1988 Visitor published by the very capable staff of the University of Minnesota, George Wardlow[4] offered a concise historical perspective of agricultural education and explored four alternatives which we as vocational agriculture educators might follow. He suggested we 1) could remain status quo, 2) we could refocus program emphasis on agribusiness, 3) we could offer programs of agriculture literacy 4) or we could make no changes and continue to identify or react to local needs predominantly and probably over time continue to decline significantly.

Over my professional life, I feel I have enjoyed the high points of our program. I reaped the fruits of labor of our former leaders who laid the foundation. Over my span of work we have maintained or performed a light overhaul job to keep our program in tune. I'm proud of our historical accomplishments.

1. Our students primarily grew up in the farming business in which we were to further train them. They had a good understanding of practical farming and we built on this foundation.
2. Our leadership training was exemplary and well-recognized. If youth did not farm, they were hired by others because of their personal characteristics which we helped develop.
3. We effectively used the problem solving approach to teaching and other educators recognized this superior teaching method. People hired our graduates because they were noted for their problem-solving skills.

4. We taught our students to be superior producers, increasing our nation's productive capacity.
5. Our attempts in adult education were honest, forthright, sporadic at best, but important.

Our profession has weaknesses as any program does.

1. Most of our graduates did not go into farming and as a result of the objectives coming down through governmental legislation and subsequent policies, anyone who did not enter farming/ranching was more or less an accountability failure.
2. For those who did not farm/ranch, our program provided minimal management knowledge and skills for starting or operating a business, as we were preoccupied with the applied science of production.
3. Though we recognized the need to train for agribusiness, we made only minor adjustments to our primarily production-based program and specific curriculum so desperately needed by agribusiness, thus agribusiness has not developed. From 1956 when agribusiness was born we have not capitalized on that opportunity.

Mysterious as it may seem, even with these admitted weaknesses in our program, it grew in size, scope and respectability in the education community. Why? I believe it is because we were protected from scrutiny and free market tests of accountability. However, in spite of this protection, changes were forced on our program because:

1. The source of supply (students for our classrooms) dried up, farms became fewer in number and larger in scope. In my state, the larger family owners/operators are less likely to encourage their children to take vocational agriculture but encourage them to take an academically oriented college preparatory program emphasizing business and accounting courses. This has been particularly pronounced when these students attend post-secondary education resulting in a substantial increase in business finance, accounting, management and marketing and decreases in all degree areas of agriculture except agribusiness.
2. In 1963 vocational agriculture and other specifically designated vocational program areas lost an important franchise or protective device. Vocational educators were challenged to educate students for jobs at less than the baccalaureate level wherever they existed rather than have vocational program protective legislation by subject matter area. At that point our program began to experience the influence of the free market forces and those of the governmental enterprise and as always, the tugs and pulls that exist between the complicated and always argumentative compromise between these two forces (bodies).

I wonder why I and other of our agricultural education profession did not spend more time isolating and studying the mitigating realities that agricultural education was flourishing within the free enterprise market oriented economy within states before it became an entity or institution of federal government in 1917.

I've wondered why our leadership has always been so extremely sensitive and, I fear, controlled by what happened with our federal laws and policies. There has always seemed to be a prevailing trust that what was written into Federal regulations was appropriate, and should be applied in every situation due primarily to the fact that it came from the federal government and there were financial incentives attached.

I find little evidence that our leaders seriously questioned and debated whether or not vocational agricultural education should have been governed **primarily** over such a long period of time by institutions of government or whether or not a more free market-oriented program would have been more appropriate.

I have wondered where agricultural education might be today if we had followed a model more in line with our country's **market economic model** rather than following somewhat blindly the institutional governmental model.

The free market model, pre-Smith Hughes, suggested that it 1) must be based on identified needs 2) consumers must be willing to pay a competitive price for the service.

This model suggests that markets and prices interpret the wants of consumers in terms of **supply, demand and price**. It is these three concerns—supply, demand and price—that provide a means by which people organize themselves, their resources, inventions, services, and their investments to satisfy their wants. Free markets and prices established therein, measure, record and organize production. (output of product). Just as our lower brain is the nerve center which automatically coordinates your body, so **markets** are the nerve center of free-enterprise.

From 1917 to 1963 we enjoyed an unusually protective umbrella of institutional governmental support, vocational agriculture had specific legislation that protected our "right" to continue doing what we were doing with little regard for meeting the test inherent in our economic system which is; 1) were needs identified, 2) were clients (local taxpayers) willing to pay, 3) was the investment accurately measured, recorded and 4) was there a measurable profit from the endeavor. In other words, what was the return for dollars expended?

Good or bad our program was an institution of government, we were protected from scrutiny and from free market tests. Aldrich's comments in "Understanding

Agriculture", that it was not until the vocational education act of 1963 that vocational agricultural education and other vocational programs lost their programmatic designations and as you know at that time, all education for employment at less than the doctorate level was referred to generically. Some programs met the market tests well and even grew, others were rocked substantially and some programs were eliminated or soon will be.

Since being introduced to a modified free enterprise economic model in 1963, vocational agriculture has wisely, I feel, supplemented its traditional sole governmental institutional structure with another institutional structure that includes business, industry, educators, state and federal, governmental personnel as well as teachers from the secondary, post-secondary and collegiate levels. The free market test of relevance 1) need, 2) willingness to pay have been replaced by bodies that evaluate extensively and critically and strive to bring about change through needs analysis, critical review, and timely and needed networking to accommodate a degree of accountability; the test of a free market model.

As a result of agricultural education losing it's long time protection, it became apparent if we were to survive that we would need a better, closer, more active tie with the world of business and industry who deal with the free market model daily and a lesser bond but a continuing relationship with our long time institutional structure at the federal level. During the Regan-Stockman administration where the government has been preoccupied with concepts of sound money, capitalist prosperity, social mobility, entrepreneurial dynamism and individual incentive programs, programs that rely primarily on governmental institutions are at best struggling, unless they had a military connection. The American Vocational Education Association (AVA) surgence to make a military tie in congressional hearings for vocational education was never very successful. Stockman[6] commented "governmental controls are the malignant cancer of state power, controlled markets feed bureaucratic expansions, coercion and caprice at a staggering rate are prevalent once the erroneous enterprise is launched. However, governmental, institutional controls will ultimately be shattered by potent forces from the vast material and global marketplaces." Such statements malign vocational education and further stress the need for comprehensive ties to the market-oriented community.

The National Council for Vocational and Technology Education in Agriculture which we have recently initiated may prove historically to be one of the more prudent policy decisions that agricultural education has made. I believe we will look back at the formation of the National Council for Vocational and Technology Education in agriculture as being one of the more monumental efforts and ultimately more important than the 1917 Smith Hughes act. This council's potential is in moving us, vocational agricultural education away from our sole dependence on the federal institutional governmental structure while providing a flavor of the free market. It forms a national partnership to foster creative and innovative leadership for the improvement and further development of our field. The strength of our partnership is the forced **networking** which will harness public education with our free enterprise partners in business and industry whom we hopefully serve and serve profitably.

The marriage of agricultural business and industry, public schools, state department of education, colleges and universities, government and professional organization is to me, a significant and laudable step.

We, by working through the council, will hopefully 1) stimulate our creativity, 2) suggest new program approaches 3) create a non-threatening environment in which to change and 4) actively discourage outdated programs and provide enriched models of successful programs from which we might all learn and change.

The objectives of the council bear repeating:

- provide a forum in which the profession can address important issues and generate solutions to problems of common concern
- promote the improvement and further development of vocational and technology education in agriculture at the local, state and national levels
- involve business, industry, government and education in developing and evaluating high quality agricultural education programs
- provide a structure to search out resources from public and non-public sources

I have always believed that our profession should be more conscious to signals of the market place, yet I realize that these reactions have caused the professional problems. Agricultural education has experienced a lot of trends and program emphasis. I personally have been guilty of providing emphasis and chasing rainbows in the following areas: Careers and Guidance, Public Relations, Leadership-Social Skills, Math-Science, International Agricultural Education, Farm Management, Policy Development and General Agriculture.

Vocational agricultural education at times reminds me of a friend, who for recreation, boarded a freight train on Friday night to spend the week-end he knew know where. However, on Monday he usually had the most interesting stories. As a profession we have frequently operated by applying hobo ethics—we've ridden band wagons and freight trains just because trends have been rolling in a particular direction. We have changed our colors like the lizards in New Mexico in order to identify with or blend into the prevailing environment. Such shifts are at best survival techniques, popular for

a time, uneventful for a period, relatively short-lived but popular enough to identify with a larger thrust that was in vogue with our funding agency or institution of government with whom we were seeking favor. As a professional agricultural educator I have been guilty of posing as an expert in science, mathematics, guidance, social science, communications and now its acceptable to be a generalist, and promote general education in agriculture through the various states agriculture in the elementary schools programs.

We have exerted a lot of energy in areas promoted at the federal level. Yet we realize that the dollars from our federal institutional structure have been modest when compared with funds expended from primarily state and local levels. Dollars generated at the local and state level were primarily by businesses and industries in the private sector stimulated by the profit motive, yet often we did not meet local or state needs.

The reason I feel that the grass roots farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses have supported vocational agriculture so well is that as a profession we may be the only entity in the public schools that have taught our students the principles of our capitalist system—specifically that:

- It's good to have private ownership of property and exercise ownership rights.
- It's good that students learn to make a profit.
- It's good to be in business for yourself and produce goods for needed services in order to enjoy economic freedom.
- It's good to have free competitive markets as they provide needed human incentives.

Private owners/operators, businesses and industry realize that if they are to survive it is absolutely essential that our citizens be more economically literate. Citizens must understand how to live and work in our free enterprise market oriented economy. Because our National Council for Vocational and Technology Education in Agriculture has built business and industry into a partnership it appears that if we are to be a serious partner and benefactor of both government and business this holds implications for philosophy, policies and program development well into the future.

The CASS report on American capitalism," stated that capitalism as it has developed in this country is a hardy force for decentralized power. Its vital role lies in providing the incentives and the competitive effort that produce a growing and widely diffused abundance while preserving individual freedom. In our world economy markets and competition have proved to be the most successful means for achieving and retaining prosperity. Competitive market forces enable an economy to expand to serve all the people, especially the consumers. Free competition thus leads to progress and profits for the whole society.

Increasingly the American business system is adapting itself to serve the general welfare as it maintains a maximum amount of voluntary action. Profit motivation is certainly not antisocial. In the overwhelming majority of cases, public interest and private advantage are compatible. If it were not so, the capitalist system would be untenable and indefensible. American businessmen are tending more and more to make decision from the standpoint not only of profit and loss to themselves, but of profit and loss to the community in total. Modern business philosophy looks upon management of a publicly owned corporation as a stewardship, a social responsibility. Free enterprise fosters the dignity of the individual, civil liberty, and political and economic freedom. Dewhurst* contends that "Of all the great industrial nations, the one that clings most tenaciously to private capitalism has come closest to the socialist goal of providing abundance for all in a classless society."

My thesis and pleas as an agricultural educator is for our profession to identify ways to work closer with the private sector, agricultural producers, agribusinesses and formalize these bonds with strong state councils fashioned after our newly organized National Council.

As we establish state councils one of our first orders of business should be the development of curriculum that:

1) promotes economic literacy and entrepreneurial knowledge skills attitudes and experiences with the students enrolled in vocational agricultural education.
2) encourages the training of employees for agricultural production-agribusiness at less than the baccalaureate level and promote post-secondary preparation
3) encourages adult farm and agribusiness education programs
4) allows, on a time-available basis, vocational educators to provide consultative services to a host of different general education teachers who should be responsible for developing general understanding about agriculture.

By changing the agricultural education program, hopefully the result will be that we will be known as "champions" of the free enterprise philosophy, we will flourish as a result of our reorientation and meeting the market-oriented tests.

State supervisors should, as a minimum, establish a state council and encourage establishment of local councils patterned after the national council now in place. Also they should influence teacher certification standards to certify only persons with a minimum of one or more years of business experience. Teacher trainers should be sure their students have the economic, business and agribusiness courses to be proficient in accomplishing their new role. Teacher educators should

also be active in the state councils and assure that each graduate has the skills necessary to establish local councils. Local teachers, upon establishing local councils, should become the fountain head for teaching students understanding of economic literacy and with specific skills essential to starting and operating businesses, preferably agricultural and agribusinesses but not limited to those areas.

Many of you have waited for me to discuss our future in agriscience and the acceptance of agriculture for science credit; well, wait no more. My values suggest that science should be left to the scientific community. That we are not as well equipped as we might be to pose as experts in this racing field and, frankly, I think that area is doing quite well without our help. I can visualize that our graduates could perhaps teach courses in agriscience that might substitute for some of the basic or lower level science courses but not for those junior and senior science courses essential in preparation for a career in college in the highly advanced scientific fields.

My gut tells me that by aggressively moving agriculture education in the direction of economic literacy and agribusiness that we will experience many successes since it is similar to what we have been doing, it requires less change, and we are better equipped educationally to carry out these new challenges if we make the needed vital connections to society through the councils as suggested.

However, my gut also tells me that the profession will not pursue aggressively this suggested new direction but rather will follow the agriscience model which, in my mind, seems to be a lesser alternative due primarily to bountiful expertise that already exists in America's scientific field. While we as a profession will pursue agriscience, colleges of agriculture over the U.S. will also be moving aggressively towards formulating molecular biology and life science configurations only over time to find that the best training for research and practice in agricultural science is training in the basic areas of science. Unfortunately, our historical evoluation of colleges of agriculture, oriented to applied science, will have been disrupted to a point of no return. Eventually colleges of agriculture will disbanded, as the applied disciplines are absorbed into the reconfigured basic discipline-oriented departments.

My thought to you on departing from the field was written by John Wesley who traveled on horseback through England preaching. He wrote in his journal: "I shall pass through this world but once; any good that I can do, or any kindness that I can show, let me not defer it or reject it, fore I shall not pass this way again."

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